god only knows (but you'll never leave him)
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by gardingers

Summary

Nigel Colbie had his plan, and that plan failed. Alex Forbes had no plan, but did not ask for the situation he put himself in. With a police investigation hovering over their heads, two dead parents and a girl in a greenhouse one thing is startlingly clear: Separation is not an option.

Or: The one where Nigel and Alex flee, and conduct the road trip from Hell.

Notes

trigger warnings for the prologue:
mentions of death
wound description
blood

authors notes at the end!!

See the end of the work for more notes

Chapter 1: I. Prologue

Nigel was silent as Alex dragged the wet washcloth along the side of his face. He tried his best to be gentle with the pressure, feeling like Nigel might shatter and fall down the drain if he pressed as hard as he wanted to, but still managed to be firm enough to make Nigel twinge. The sparse shrapnel burns littered across the side of his temple had looked a lot worse in the rain, the downpour diluting the blood. Alex lost in the monotonous rhythm of wiping and wringing and wiping again, remembered how bad it had looked. How small Nigel had been with his face covered in blood, back flat against the grit of the tracks. Alex swallowed, turning Nigel's jaw with his free hand, before wiping again.

The bathroom of the Colbie house was pristine, meticulously cleaned and looked as if it had never been used – a sight that fit well when matched with the overwhelmingly acrid smell of bleach. Alex was crouched in between the seat of the toilet and the bath, where Nigel sat, a bowl of pink-tinged water and a first aid kit near his knees. The silence that hung between them was nowhere near comfortable, but Alex could still feel what Nigel was thinking. So much anguish, so much pain, so much loathing that it made his head spin and his hand twitch – Nigel inhaled sharply.

"It wasn't supposed to go like this."

Alex wrung the cloth, wordlessly. He thought carefully for a moment, a bundle of nerves in his stomach and a deep dread settling in his shoulders. Nigel's reaction, sinking into himself like a wounded animal had told him as much. The way he'd let Alex hold his face, assess his injuries and drag him back to the house from the tracks had let away that something sturdy had broken within him. Nigel Colbie was not the kind of boy to go pliant, to let himself be looked after and to wear such an expression of lost hope. Alex was so unused to the display of vulnerability that looking Nigel in the eyes at that moment felt raw and tender, like staring into the sun. He stared at the tiles, trying to feign nonchalance while his heartbeat through his chest, eyes settling on one perfect drop of blood on the white ceramic. It was a grounding reminder of what had happened just an hour before.

Alex found that his voice was hoarse, from the screaming and the crying, coming out as a weary croak as he asked; "How was it supposed to go?"

He looked to Nigel then. So much torment hidden behind such beautiful eyes. Alex just asked himself how a boy so precariously organised and sensibly numb to the horrors he commits could unravel so quickly in one night. The blood in Nigel's hair and on his face had dried and then been wiped off, exposing the spattering of small burns and lesions- sure to scar but not worth the questions at the hospital. The worst of them all was a gash just into Nigel's hairline, deep enough to poke out through his hair and scary enough for Alex to contemplate using the Dermabond tucked into the very old-looking first aid kit. There was a swipe of pink flesh just under his right eye, swollen slightly and inflamed alongside the greening trace of an old bruise by his jaw. Alex remembered what that piece of skin had felt like under his fist, and a sudden pang of guilt flashed in his chest as he looked upon what could only be a fallen angel. Nigel swallowed thickly, uncomfortable under the scrutiny of watching eyes, slowly moving his gaze to the space behind Alex. He was shivering and it was the most human thing Alex had ever seen him do. Still in his white vest, the blood of his mother blending in with his own now, so small and fragile as he shook from the cold. His lips, chapped and bitten, settled into a thin line as he struggled to push out the words he so desperately wanted to say as his Adam's apple bobbed uncertainly. Nigel whispered his answer, bending his head down so his drenched hair tickled the top of Alex's.

"You were supposed to kill me." Nigel sounded so certain, so displeased and so angry that it sent shivers down Alex's spine. It was like that fact was so obvious and evident, that it was a crucial step Alex had missed and his ignorance was truly infuriating. Nigel reared his head, thin fingers reaching out suddenly for the cloth still clutched in Alex's hand. He plucked it out of his grasp and dropped it carelessly in the water bowl, slowly standing like he was afraid he'd fall over if he did it too fast. Still kneeling, Alex just watched him. In a way, he was worried. But for once in all the time he'd ever known him, Alex was not worried for himself. For his integrity, for his freedom or his own life. He was worried about Nigel.

With the gentle voice and candour of an adult talking to a child, Alex plainly inquired "Why?"

Nigel stood by the door; hand pressed onto the arch where reddish fingerprints smudged onto the white paint as he readjusted his grip. Alex couldn't see his face, but from the sudden tense in his shoulders, he knew that Nigel was stunned. In the overwhelmingly delusional yet brilliant space that was Nigel's mind, was his plan so flawless that it did not warrant questioning? He turned around as Alex stood up. Face

harsh, brow drawn, pupils blown. It was the biggest reaction Alex had ever seen him give. Even after being punched, drugged, hung out of a train and his parents shot in front of him. Nigel without apathy, Nigel with feeling. Something had gone deeply wrong. The knot of worry blossomed further.

He fumbled for words, stuttering, looking at the floor. Alex just let him, watching his own private delusion fall apart thought by thought. Eventually, Nigel settled on an answer, and let it out with gritted teeth and a bared soul.

“So, we could be together.” He paused, desperately trying to find Alex’s eyes with his own. They met, and the weight of Nigel’s reasoning settled in the chemical scorched air between them. The gravity of their situation, the predicament they had found themselves in. With two dead and gutted Colbie’s in the basement, a murdered girl in a greenhouse and the hot breath of a police investigation on the back of their necks. Alex should’ve been angry, positively fuming, and ready to end the rest of Nigel’s bloodline. Because he then knew then what Nigel had planned. He had never meant to be around to deal with the fallout of his actions, he was never going to go to jail and get caught. He wanted to die, by Alex’s hand, so he could hover in the back of his Jacks head and guide him through an eternity of righteous killing in the name of their father’s once great order. His Maraclea claimed, and power at their fingertips. Never the one to be punished, never to act alone again. Their unification, their joining in death was all Nigel had ever wanted – and he had failed at his one chance. The only chance he would ever get, with Alex holding a gun to his cheek and the heavens falling.

Alex moved as Nigel’s face crumpled, one long step across the bathroom to scoop up the fragile and shivering boy in front of him. To hug the boy that had ruined his life, was an unthinking action. To bury his face in his shoulder was more of a comfort for himself now because Alex felt it too. Something that Nigel has tapped into earlier on, as they dug their way into each other thoughts and indulged themselves in the feelings of the other. An unyielding need to be close, to stay together, to act as one. Nigel felt like ice, his skin damp, and the sodden material of his vest heavy. His hair dripped onto the side of Alex’s face, and his bony fingers dug into the material of his jacket. They stayed like that until Nigel stopped making noise, quiet forcefully restrained sniffs that shook his entire body. Alex couldn’t find it within himself to hate Nigel, he realised then. For having a life without him, now that he’d experienced the one with him in it would be like losing a part of himself forever.

They untangled from their hug, Alex moved so slowly, like Nigel was a porcelain ornament never meant to be broken, but remained close – foreheads bent, with hands on upper arms.

“Are we not together now?” Alex mused, knowing the answer.

“You know what I meant, Jack” Nigel muttered, defeatedly.

“But we are still together” Alex swallowed, looking through his brow into the dejected eyes in front of him “We can’t be separated.”

Nigel looked up at him, understanding what he meant “In life, we can’t be separated.”

“Yes,” Alex encouraged him, trying to inspire some semblance of hope and action within his Pike. It was a simple answer to a simpler question, but the layers of meaning beneath it was ladened with importance “So what are we going to do now? About them? About Susan?”

Nigel let out a shaky breath, and Alex felt his mind race and his heart thrum as he thought about what he’d done – uncaring if he got caught, knowing the destiny that he thought awaited him had been taken away. Alex’s eyes bore into him then, hand moving to cup the back of Nigel’s head, to bring their foreheads together fully. Nigel met his gaze, and in that moment, in a house that may as well have been a graveyard, in clothes soaked through by the cry of the Almighty and the firework pattern of a shrapnel wound etched across the side of his head, Nigel answered:

“We run.”

Chapter 2: I.

Chapter Summary

One train. One bed. A whole lot of feelings.

Chapter Notes

general trigger warnings for like minds. nothing too bad in here. alex is just a bit conflicted about how he feels about nigel. the usual. ALSO...just want to clarify if i do carry on with this fic, the whole nigel and his mum thing Did Not Happen. i am not touching that with a two foot pole. if im writing ab the whole maraclea thing, we r just removing that part of the process Entirely.

hope u enjoy this! find me on twitter and tumblr @ lcvejcys

See the end of the chapter for more notes

I.

“Are you afraid of me?” Their second train of Alex’s never-ending day threw itself along the tracks as Nigel stared from the seat across. It was raining, despite the sun hiding behind the clouds, a thin sheet of icy water lingering in the mid-afternoon air. Alex checked his watch. Twelve pm. He’d slept for an hour.

It was the first time Nigel had spoken in four hours, and Alex had to pretend that he wasn’t relieved he hadn’t gone completely comatose. They hadn’t said much after leaving the Colby house, after all, there wasn’t really much to say – instead, there were mountains to do. Alex knew they had to leave Leeds. Of course, it would throw their identities out to the police and target them as main suspects but the thought of laying low in the blood-drenched shell of the Colby house or ghosting around the corridors of the school pretending that Nigel wasn’t a serial killer made Alex wish he’d been the one on the receiving end of that gun. Alex squeezed his fist in his lap, a quick flex, and scrunched his nose at the feeling. His palms were dry, skin cracked slightly with a raw ache spreading across his knuckles. After the bathroom, he’d cleaned. Everything. While Nigel had forged a letter of absence for his parents and emptied his father's safe, telling an unknown reader that the Colby family had unexpectedly immigrated to Australia and brought their troubled son with them. It

was a matter of urgency, Nigel had lied, a retreat to rekindle lost family values. Alex had snorted quietly to himself when reading it over. A bit too fucking late for that.

Nigel didn't cough or ask his question again. Alex knew that he knew he'd heard him, he could feel him poking around in the back of his head, looking for the answer if his Jack wasn't going to give it to him. It made him want to pull his hair out, solely on the fact that he didn't know how to do it back to him.

"Can you stop doing that?" A quick demand, Alex didn't even look at him but felt his reaction – a smug smile, victory for jolting him. He looked at him then, with a sharp warning glance, Nigel just stared out the window with the quirk of a smile on his lips. *I'll take that as a yes.*

In all honesty, Alex was afraid of Nigel. In the way, a rabbit would be of a serpent. Nigel looked harmless, a boy with burns on his temple, a cut on his lip, and green remnants of healed bruising littering his jaw, short and slight and enveloped in a coat that was oddly tailored but still too big on his frame. Alex wasn't afraid of his stature or his strength, if they fought, he'd win – he knew that for a fact, based on how well Nigel took punches. Instead, the knot in his stomach grew when Alex thought of what Nigel could make him do. With those soulless eyes and his clever words, his whispers, his books, and those ghostly touches. Alex shook off a shiver, trying not to think of how hard Nigel could push his buttons before Alex ended up just like him, with blood on pale hands and bodies in his basement.

The train docked at the station about half an hour later, the last stop – Glasgow Central. It was Alex who was smart enough to make them change clothes in the train's toilet, they were still in their clothes from the previous night, the ones without blood on them that is. When it had been his turn, Alex caught himself in the plastic mirror on the compartment's side wall and saw nothing but a shell staring back at him. It was a strange sensation, to know that he was on autopilot, just moving but never seeing. There'd been no sense of overwhelm since the bathroom, no great gust of panic or fear at watching his perfectly planned life being rendered to tatters, just doing, and moving. Even when he'd shrugged on that old plaid jacket and looked down at his shoes, to see a tiny droplet of blood on the toe of his trainers, he hadn't tensed. Just wiped it off, and unlocked the door, faced with the ever-nonchalant Nigel. Alex had the feeling he felt the same way, but there was the question of if Nigel had ever experienced anything but apathy at all.

They found the bed and breakfast on a corner near Charing Cross, it was old with its red brick and lace curtains, but it was cheap and seedy enough to let two clearly underage boys share a room for the night. Nigel had checked them in, smart enough to dot hints of a Yorkshire accent into his voice as he charmed the old lady at the front. The front of house was oddly cluttered, all floral wallpaper, complimentary mints on a coffee table stacked with gossip magazines, the white skirting boards stained yellow from a resident smoker – or many of them. She had one room, Alex overheard, poking at one of the bookshelves with his travel case in his other hand, it was the only clean one available, but she'd give it to them for cheap. Nigel merely slid her an English twenty-pound note in response, and she took it without hesitation, turning to her rack filled with keys and sun-bleached tags.

"You lads on holiday then?" She hummed, glancing over her glasses as she struggled to find the labels. Nigel glanced at Alex, a small smirk on his lips – sickeningly proud of the predicament he'd put them both in.

"Something like that" Alex replied, as merrily as he could.

He'd understood, as they'd opened the room's door, why the desk woman was so happy to settle on a low price. The ensuite had mould in the bath and the carpet was a disgusting shade of green, with stains in odd places and the odd brown stain from grubby hands shining bright on the off-white walls. But, most annoyingly, there was only one bed. A double bed, in the centre of the room, with floral covers that matched the wallpaper in the reception downstairs. *Must've been a set*, a snide voice quipped inside his head.

"Home sweet home," Nigel said out loud this time, dropping his case by the door and setting himself on the side of the bed. It was dripping with sarcasm, and Alex was too tired to start an argument about how this was all his fucking fault.

"I'll ask if they've got a spare blanket down at the front" Alex mumbled quickly, already turning towards the door.

"Why?" Nigel mused, kicking his shoes off, and shrugging his coat from his shoulders. He cocked his head at Alex like he was stupid, but Alex knew so much better. When he didn't reply, and instead turned back, Nigel stood up and shrugged. "Jack, we shared a room for half a year, I don't think this makes much of a difference."

His arrogance was infuriating, but there was something else behind those words. Alex could feel it, and he couldn't put his finger on what it was. Something sharp and thorny, something utterly devilish that only Nigel could get away with. Truly wicked and dangerous. Alex told himself he hadn't known Nigel was manipulating him the night his parents died. He'd told himself he'd missed something important, been too intrigued at cracking open the new kid and all his secrets so he could confirm just how big of a freak he was, to fully understand whether or not it had been him who'd mutilated Susan in that greenhouse. Slowly, over the long hours of the past day and a half, he'd realised he'd been lying to himself. Alex liked the wicked, the danger, forever an adrenaline junkie throwing himself out of the train that was Nigel Colby. So, he turned away from the door and feigned his own indifference.

"Okay then. Just don't hog the covers."

He looked different when he was sleeping. Alex hated it. The sun was setting behind the drawn lace curtains and the last streams of sunlight from that never-ending day settled politely on Nigel's sleeping face. He'd rolled over at some point; Alex didn't know when – he'd been asleep himself up until a few long moments ago. Waking up to Nigel's foot on top of his, his nose next to Alex's shoulder, smelling like old money and cleaning chemicals. Somehow, those sharp features were soft, long fluttering eyelashes and hair mussed up in that boyish way. Stupidly innocent, drawing shallow breaths that eventually morphed into snores. Alex knew it like the back of his hand, he'd sounded like that the night of the train before the rag got pressed over his nose.

Alex hadn't thought about Josh in at least two weeks. It was a sad realisation because Alex didn't want to forget about him. Instead, the hole in his brain reserved for memories of Josh giggling at his jokes, craned over whatever makeshift firecracker he'd been making that day was growing smaller. Filled with another face, one that breathed out of its mouth while it slept, long and elegant fingers curled into the duvet he clutched like it was going to disappear. In that moment of peace, as the sun dipped below the horizon and Alex stole glances at Nigel, he couldn't imagine his life going any other way. Even if he hated how they got there, all the blood, all the paranoia and the mind games. Alex was sure enough that no matter what he'd done, he and Nigel would've ended up together. Even if the shot had hit him, there was no separation. Their bond had gone silent, Alex missed it.

When he glanced back, set on one last look before he'd get up and do

something that wasn't just laying there, Alex found Nigel staring back at him.

"Wh'Time is it?" It was more of a grumble than an actual question, Alex got it either way and pulled up his arm to glance at his watch.

"Quarter-past 12" He paused "At night." Nigel snorted a laugh, sitting up slightly. He was wearing an old t-shirt, some band from the eighties plastered on the front. It was weird to see him in anything that wasn't a white shirt and tie, never mind something so obscenely casual.

"At night" He mumbled, smiling slyly, trying to grumble it in the same strung-out way Alex knew he'd done. *Barely conscious and already taking the piss*, Alex thought. Nigel reached for the bedside table and picked up the TV remote, settling himself against the headboard.

"Congratulations," Nigel said.

"What?" Alex sat up beside him.

"I actually heard you think that." Alex smiled to himself, quite pleased. It was the small victories he supposed. He pretended like he didn't see Nigel staring at him as the TV clicked on.

It took about thirty seconds before Alex felt things crumble out from beneath him again, thirty seconds of pleased smirking and a gloating comment on his lips before the world seemed to shake and fall off of its axis. BBC One's twelve 'o'clock news buzzed up, and the news anchor garbled some posh shit about the House of Commons before the news graphic changed at the bottom.

"TOP STORY: FAMILY IN WEST YORKSHIRE CONFIRMED MISSING. POLICE TO INVESTIGATE FURTHER"

Alex swallowed loudly, as the faces of Mr and Mrs Colby appeared on screen for a long second, the broadcaster reading out the headlines before the screen changed again. Alex looked at Nigel once more, this time on the screen, where he stood in his school uniform.

Nigel was missing too. How long was it until they realised he wasn't? How long until they found their missing people gutted and buried in the basement of their own house? How long until Alex's dad realised he hadn't just run away for a few days, frustrated and reeling off the back of his own teenage angst? He spiralled, quickly downwards, as it all crept up on him. All the guilt. All the heartache. The way he felt

blood that wasn't there under his fingernails. The only thing that kept him, from running out of the door and into the nearest police station at that very moment was a pale hand, with long and elegant fingers gripping his wrist.

The Jack and The Pike. Together.

Chapter End Notes

> what can i say? im a sucker for the one bed trope. especially when one of them is completely sick of the others shit but also having feelings and not knowing what the fuck they are. as for the mind bond thing, i view it as a kind of telepathic link? kinda unrealistic but the movie gave us so little that it might as well be canon. its 5am when im uploading this so be kind to me about any grammatical errors.
> find me on twitter and tumblr @ lcvejcys !

Chapter 3: II.

Chapter Summary

A workers shed in a loch town. A barmaid that got curious.

Chapter Notes

TW: violence, descriptions of death, blood + overall Nigel Colby behaviour.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

They left Glasgow the next day and found their hiding spot on the outskirts of a loch town that took them two train rides, four buses and two awkward hitchhikes to get to. It was the first village they'd skipped through that had no television set in the local pub and that stocked newspapers that were at least three days old. There were cobbles lining the one street that made up a town centre, a single closed grocer and a music shop adjacent to a very old-looking pub with a thatched roof. They were both tired, both quiet and both had their haunches up. If Alex hadn't known better, he would've said Nigel was taking the news of his parents and himself being reported as missing quite well. He slept when he got the chance, ate when he could and never seemed to be looking over his shoulders as harshly as Alex had been doing. But Alex did know better. Nigel watched every single person who spoke or looked in their direction like a hawk, waiting for any sign of recognition, any hunched-over whisper to a friend or a quirked eyebrow of notice. There was a certain restlessness that emanated off of him, Alex felt it every time he concentrated, like a deep itch that just wouldn't budge.

Nigel sat in the pub's booth, looking out onto the two elderly patrons that sat on their bar stools, just waiting for one of them to turn around. His face was neutral, illuminated by one frosted glass window, but every so often his eyes would dart past Alex's side. It made Alex more nervous than he'd like to admit. Not because he was worried that one of the old Scottish men would whirr around and start screaming for the police, but because he knew what Nigel would do if they so much as asked the wrong question. Alex took a swig of his beer, it was bitter, the only one with a name he actually knew plastered on the front of the three taps the pub sported.

"We can stay here for a few days" Alex murmured, hunching forwards

slightly to be heard over the buzz of the jukebox. The record, an old Irish folk song, had skipped three times since they'd sat down. "Get our bearings, decided what the next move is."

Nigel looked at him then, finally ripping those sharks' eyes of his from the backs of the pub's few inhabitants. He nodded curtly, before pausing and opening his mouth. "Do you not think a few English boys asking for a room will draw attention? Doesn't seem like that happens a lot around here." Alex knew he had a point, but every part of him was so exhausted that the idea of doing anything but laying in a bed and washing his face made his stomach hurt. Nigel glanced back towards the bar before his voice rang clear in Alex's head: *The barmaid won't stop looking at you.*

Somehow, the restlessness that had poured out of Nigel's entire demeanour ever since the hotel room in Glasgow got astoundingly worse at that moment. He was right though of course. Alex looked over his shoulder only to meet eyes with a mousy-looking woman in her early twenties staring back at him. Initially, his stomach dropped, flooded with panic that made his hand twitch and rock his pint slightly. The woman only smiled at his blunder, as Alex realised, she had no reason to stare at him – his face hadn't been on the news.

"Should talk to her. She's pretty. Could get you a free room for a night." Nigel's voice was monotone and purposefully disinterested. Alex looked back at him, still met with that face of apathy and stony nothingness. Ever since the bathroom back at the Colby's house that mask, he'd put on stayed firmly attached, even in the lighter moments Nigel was always thoroughly guarded. It made Alex feel like he was going insane like his reaction to their circumstances was unjust and exaggerated. Maybe over the past few days, he'd hoped Nigel would pretend for his sake to open up ever so slightly, instead of drowning himself in such a forced air of mystery, after all, Alex had seen him crack as he dragged a cloth over the side of his burned temple.

The restlessness seeped into Alex's bones, and even though he knew what it meant, he still downed the rest of his pint and stood up to go to the bar. And as he walked across the small pub floor, he felt the feeling change into something greener. He paid for a pint with a pound, one of the last bits of loose change they had other than a few thick bundles of twenty-pound notes. Nigel's parent's safe had been bountiful, but they had no idea what to do with the sudden wealth. If Nigel wasn't so boring and if they hadn't been teetering on a knife edge, Alex would've wanted to go out to a pub like the one they were in and get drunk until his face fell off. Smoke cigarettes, dance to

stupid pop songs and talk to nice girls like the barmaid. Though he found the thought of just sitting with Nigel's silence, waiting for whatever came out of his mouth next somewhat more comforting. Maybe Alex was strange in that way, not as much of an extrovert as he'd once thought.

The barmaid's name was Alice, and her grandparents owned the pub. It was more hers than theirs though, as her parents worked on their family farm and her granddad had been bedbound ever since the death of his wife. She'd explained this, in a thick Scottish accent that Alex could tell she was trying to make more understandable for him, as she'd handed Alex the keys to a small and unoccupied worker's hut on the outskirts of her family's estate. It honestly hadn't taken much for him to get it out of her, just a polite hello and a made-up backstory, along with a coy smile and a generous compliment. To her, Alex and Nigel were university students studying Geography at St Andrews, who'd been travelling about remote Scotland to study rock formations and the lochs for their dissertations. It was a quick lie that came out of nowhere, but it had worked. Alice had even told Alex that she'd be more than happy to show him a natural waterfall that was just south of her parent's farm. For some reason, based on her fluttering eyelashes at overly loud laughs at his few poor attempts at humour, Alex didn't think that was the only thing she wanted to show him.

Just speaking to a girl reminded him too much of Sarah, and it stung him to push through the conversation, to get him and Nigel what they needed without guilt swelling in his gut. He tried not to think of her on the cold slab at the mortuary, her skin mottled and white, the hair he once wanted to card his hand through innocently splayed around her head like a halo. At that moment, staring down at a girl that did nothing but fancy him, he had hated Nigel. Alex had wanted nothing more than to kill him himself, for him and Sarah to swap. But, as he lent on the bar and forced out his best smile to charm a woman that was obviously too old for him, Alex wanted nothing more than for Alice not to look at Nigel too closely. Not match his face to the headlines. Not for her protection. But for his. Alice had been kind enough to refuse any sort of payment for their brief stint sleeping in their hut and had even promised to drop by with some dinner if they'd wanted. Alex had said yes without thinking, without caring about how greedy he'd sounded. They both hadn't eaten a proper meal since leaving Leeds, living off of crisps and water alongside the occasional café sandwich when they'd had time to pop in between trains and buses. Alice just smiled again, wiping the bar top with her mop, and slid his pint across the deck. She didn't take the pound coin, but he

left it anyways. Alex could almost feel the holes Nigel's eyes were boring in the back of his head.

It took them a half an hour's hike to find the shack Alice had pawned off the keys for, and it was just that. A shack. The panels of it were painted blue, dark in spots where the wood had chipped, and its corrugated iron roof was slanted so the previous night's rainfall trickled off of it in steady beats, feeding the green grass that littered the hillside and everything else for miles around it. The sun was dipping behind the horizon, and a brisk chill ran through misted air. A thin fog clung to Nigel's feet as he walked ahead, glancing at his trainers and the mud that had seeped into their soles. Alex held a torch Alice had given to him after explaining the lack of streetlights up country roads, he wondered why she didn't notice the suspicious lack of belongings both Nigel and him had. No backpacks? Just two hastily packed duffels between them. University students were never too abundant though, were they?

The inside was better than they were both expecting. Nigel hadn't said much other than 'okay' when Alex had explained their living situation for at least the next two nights, but he could tell through his face that his hopes were not high. There was a rough shag carpet on a scratched wood floor, a workman's bench littered with rusted farming tools, some pieces looking like more barbaric versions of Nigel's taxidermy instruments. Most relieving of all, there were two separate cots with thick woollen blankets and flat pillows pushed against separate walls. A small gas heater in the gap between. Alex dropped his bag and crouched on the floor in front of the heater, pressing the first button that looked promising to get it started. It groaned and hummed momentarily before he felt the grill get slightly hotter, and the smell of gas trickle from the front grate. The air had a distinct chill, and Nigel sat on the cot he deemed his without removing his coat. His face was wrinkled in slight disgust, probably at the underlying smell of sweet cow shit that coated the entire hillside.

"Not good enough for you, my lord?" Alex droned, smirking as he stood up and plonked himself slightly too enthusiastically on the other cot. In all honesty, seeing Nigel finally react to the awfulness of their predicament was one of the most satisfying feelings he'd felt in ages.

Nigel just pushed himself back against the shack's wall, flinching slightly as the rotting walls creaked loudly against his weight, looking wholly unamused. Alex just cocked his head, *What?*

"Do you not think this was too nice of her? Too easy?" Restlessness

and paranoia seeped into Alex's bones again. He did think that, but it wasn't because he was convinced that Alice had her eyes glued to the news. Alex thought she was lonely and didn't get too many young men close to her age to come into her pub and ask for favours and flirt with her whilst she worked over cask taps. Nigel lent forwards, hands linked together and his knuckles white. "Should probably get rid of her before we move on."

Alex scoffed at Nigel's arrogance, pretending not to notice the deep shiver that cast itself down his spine as he thought of Alice the nice barmaid's body lying in a bloody and mangled heap at his friend's feet. There was a deep well within Nigel that Alex felt had to be filled with the blood of other people. A gaping hole that would never close, just wallow for more. It was something horrible and wretched that had not been satiated since he'd done whatever he'd done to Sarah in the greenhouse. He'd thought, in the moments before he'd just fallen asleep if Nigel knew how twisted he was, or if that hunger for desperation and pain was just second nature in his fucked-up head. And as Alex began dreaming, disgusting nightmares of John Colby's face as his own shotgun discharged into his stomach, he asked himself if Nigel thought he felt the same thing. Alex wondered if Nigel felt as empty as he did sometimes like nothing was ever right in the world and that he was wrong for just being there. That itself was something Alex was not sure of. Isn't killing such an extraordinary feeling? It was. It was the most powerful Alex had ever felt in his entire life, but the anger and the pain that came in the aftermath were brutal to the point that it made his mind feel shattered and broken. Like the person, he was had died and been replaced by a bloodstained replica with a hole in its chest. So, he stared at Nigel, in that moment of heavy silence and just shook his head, defeated.

"You really don't know when to stop, do you?" There was no sense of anger in his voice, only pity, Nigel bristled at the sound of it.

"You were the one who wanted to keep us together, Jack." It was almost a hiss. "I just don't think she's as clueless as you think she is." It was a barrage of belittlement, and Alex was just happy he could see right through it. He stared at the face of the sleeping boy from the hotel room, clutching his duvet and burrowing his head into Alex's shoulder. Nigel cared about protecting him as much as Alex did him. He was scared and tired and slightly unhinged. The day suddenly grew slow, and Alex could feel his eyes grow heavy with wanting sleep, so very over the principal of the entire conversation. He laid flat on his back, before turning to face the wall, acting as if Nigel hadn't even opened his mouth at all in the first place.

“Wake me up if Alice comes by with food,” Alex spoke to the wood.

She did come by with food, and Alex never looked for the kindness of a stranger ever again. Alice had knocked twice on the shed door, and Alex had slept through her quick call of hello. Nigel had been awake. When he woke there was a long moment where he forgot where he was, what was going on and how he got there. Although the confusion was alarming, for the few seconds it lasted, the peace that came with it was blanketing. The tension that had slowly built up in his shoulders over the past few days was released, and the first coherent thought that sprung to his mind was that of homework he would never have to do again. And then his eyes stopped blurring, and his ears tuned into the white noise of the rooms, and that’s when he realised what had happened. There was a dripping sound coming from the workbench, steady and barely audible, covered up by the shuffling sound of feet and panting breaths. Alex sat up slowly, still tired, only for his eyes to widen as his eyes rested on the back of Nigel’s head. He was hunched over, wiping something long and sharp on his shirt, and next to his feet protruded a slender pair of legs, caked in crimson.

“No-“ Alex started, Nigel whipped his head around to look at him, startled like he was a child that had been caught doing something naughty.

“Don’t scream. Jack-“Alex must’ve looked like he was about to burst because Nigel flew to stand and lunged at his bed- fist coming up to cover Alex’s mouth. His grip was solid enough for him to flinch, nails digging into his face as Nigel shushed him with the most urgency Alex had ever seen him express. It was startling, for him to be so close, they were almost nose-to-nose. His stomach twisted, as they both breathed, Alex trying to catch his breath, Nigel so pumped up on what he’d just done. But there was something different in those eyes, something like a wild animal, shocked. Nigel wasn’t enjoying himself; something was deeply wrong. Slowly, Nigel loosened his grip, pulling back with fervent whispers, something in Alex’s head just repeated the words, *LetmeexplainLetmeexplain-*. Only when Nigel dropped his hand, did he feel the wet presence of blood on his lips, and see the horror that lay by the door of the shed.

Alice lay, crumpled and curled up, the green of her overalls drenched in thick red. He followed it up her body, from where it pooled on the floor, to the gaping tear that stretched across her neck. One of her pale, and outstretched hands reached out to the left. Her fingers already stiffening, sticky with her nail polish chipped. They’d been

groping the floor while she died, searching for the fragile blade of a pocketknife. The blade was short and stubby, bitterly he realised that it might as well have been a letter opener when faced with Nigel. There was no food with her, none on the ground, no bag to carry it in. Alex looked to the workbench, where all the tools sat undisturbed, only to find that one looked different. A hand scythe, old, but sharp enough to cut grass and much more evidently, dripped blood onto the wood floor. Nigel was waiting for him, watching his face as Alex tried to figure out what had happened, and how he'd slept through it. He must've felt that he didn't understand, the question marks floating around his brain.

"She knew…" It wasn't a quip or a smart-arsed comment about how he was right. That's what struck Alex the most. Nigel sounded genuinely nervous, scared even. But Alex could feel that he wasn't disturbed by what he'd just done. A means to an end.

"Why did you-" Alex swallowed, voice hoarse and croaking. Nigel stood up, waving a hand to the knife on the ground.

"She pulled it on me!" Something didn't feel right. Alex looked up at him, taking in the blood on his face, the way some of it rested on his mouth and pooled in his teeth as raked a hand through his hair.

"If she knew, why didn't she just call the police?" Nigel huffed, exasperated. He walked over to Alice's corpse, kneeling to press two fingers to her neck, waiting for a second. As he did, Alex spotted the slash on his cheek, the nail marks that clawed their way up his bloody forearms and the way his t-shirt had been stretched open at the neck. Well, he thought, at least she died fighting.

"I opened the door and let her in." He started, looking down at her open eyes and shocked expression with something that felt like pity behind his vacant gaze. "It happened fast. I noticed as soon as I closed the door, that she didn't have food with her. There was something about the way she was holding herself, nervous, scared. I could feel it. And then she told me that she saw me on the news and…It's fair to say that we didn't talk much after that."

"But-" Alex knew he wasn't saying everything that had happened. He didn't need their bond to see it, Nigel radiated panic. It was in the way his eyes shifted and his fingers twitched, in his hunched posture and the way he swiped at the blood on his face- like he was trying to take his skin off with it. Why would Alice, the nice girl from the pub, pull a pocketknife on what she knew to be a missing boy? As far as

they knew, and it had been a while since they'd caught the news, Nigel was being advertised as missing. Then he felt it, in a wave. Something animalistic, something territorial. It was black, creeping up the back of his neck and buzzing at the base of his skull, it made all the hairs on his arms stand up. Alex couldn't breathe as he deciphered it, and as he did, he knew Nigel's eyes didn't move from his face as the silence between them buzzed. Outside, there was a steady beat of rain, the heavens falling, and Alex felt like they were back on those tracks all over again.

"She didn't want me." It was barely a whisper. Nigel dropped his gaze. "She wanted you. She wanted me to leave with her, to talk to the police."

It was like Alex could see the scene in slow motion then, a nervous girl, trying to play hero knocking on the door of a viper's pit. Not knowing, that the boy she sought to rescue from the hands of someone who had taken him from his family, was minutes away from slitting her throat and leaving her body in a shed in the highlands. Alone and cold on wet wood floors. From the way she smiled and flirted with Alex in the bar, he would've been oblivious to her fear, to her perception of him. A kidnapper? A murderer.

"Fuck." He rasped. Nigel just nodded and stood up, taking one long last look at her body before pacing to his cot. They sat almost with their knees touching, Alex didn't know when he had started crying, but there was dampness on his cheeks and a gurgle in his throat, that Nigel wordlessly thwarted with an outstretched, red, hand. Alex didn't know why he grasped it as tightly as he did, something about the hand of a friend- even one as fucked up as Nigel, who caused his life to shatter and implode- was grounding enough to stop the panic that rose in his chest.

"We have to go, Jack," Nigel spoke gently. "I think she already called the police." Alex glanced at Alice's corpse, wondering if he was the monster, she'd seen in him. He nodded.

"What do we do? About her." Nigel just squeezed his hand while he thought.

"There's a creek. Saw it as we walked up here. Put her in there, take the knife and the scythe." It was clinical, and matter-of-fact, the way he spoke. Alex found it comforting, for once, that someone knew what to do. So he didn't have to think.

“Your clothes?” He glanced pointedly at the blood dripped on his t-shirt, the patches of it that seeped into his jeans and stuck to his shoes.

“I'll change at the creek.” Nigel nodded. His hand was cold, but the way he whispered was warming. Alex dropped his hand.

They didn’t know how much time they had left if any police had been called, if Nigel was telling the truth, Alex guessed it would still be enough. As they moved, mechanically and quietly, ignoring the corpse on the ground until it came to lifting her, Alex knew something had changed. Maybe it was a discovery he’d made about Nigel. That he didn’t work for just himself, that all his actions weren’t drenched in selfishness and arrogance. He felt panic, he was uncertain, not the ghoul of faceless apathy Alex had seen in him in the wake of Susan's death. Most of all, he was protective. He meant it when they agreed to never be separated because he’d been given an outlet to escape. Nigel could’ve blamed it all on Alex, gone back to a life improved and without his parents, but he didn’t. He settled for trailing through bogland, hauling the corpse of a woman who’d become eight times heavier in death, as Scottish rain drenched his shoulders and pushed cold into his bones. He’d settled for not knowing where he’d sleep that night when he’d sleep or eat next. He’d settled for blood underneath his fingernails, staining his clothes even after he’d shrugged them off in the icy rain.

Alex was never just The Jack. He couldn’t be that by himself. And Nigel couldn’t exist for the purpose he served without him either. Their hands met again as Alice laid face down in the running water, hair like a halo, with the current running pink.

They didn’t let go until they moved again.

Chapter End Notes

slow updates because its summer n im that kind of person who writes when they're inspired to! ty for all the lovely + enthusiastic comments on this, i appreciate it more than u know <3

find me on twitter and tumblr @lcvejcys

End Notes

hi! so here i go, trying to write up a multichapter fic while i have a months worth of uni deadlines to get on with. i have this fic fully fleshed out, it's just a matter of writing the parts that haven't been written, and i am so so so excited to share this little story with the 10 people who are in this fandom ....

some parts may be ooc, but thats literally just because alex and nigel are the most two dimensional character in cinematic history because of the funky writing of the film...but we move!

love to hear what you guys think, comments and kudos are greatly appreciated! come say hello to me on twitter or tumblr: lcvejcys
thanks for reading!!

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!